

SUBSPECIFIC IDENTIFICATION OF AN AUSTRALIAN SPECIMEN OF THE LITTLE RINGED PLOVER (*Charadrius dubius*)

John L. McKean* and Hilary A. F. Thompson**

The Little Ringed Plover, *Charadrius dubius*, is probably a regular visitor, though in small numbers, to northern Australia. Since last reviewing our Darwin records (McKean and Hertog, 1981) a number of further sightings have been made at the Sanderson Sewerage Ponds and on Leanyer Swamp. At least three birds were present during the 1981/82 season. One of these could be readily identified from the other two on account of its more advanced plumage. This bird was first noted on 23 January 1982 and by 13 February 1982 had donned what appeared to be full nuptial plumage.

At 0700 hours on the morning of 3 March 1981, one of us (H.A.F.T.) found the nuptial plumaged Little Ringed Plover dead on a road running through the sewerage pond area. Rigor mortis had not set in and it was surmised to have been hit by a motor vehicle the previous night. Although no bones were broken, copious internal bleeding had occurred. The bird was prepared as a study skin and is apparently the first specimen taken in Australia. Racial determination of *Charadrius dubius* visiting Australia has thus not been possible until now although it has been predicted (McKean et al., 1975, R.A.O.U. Checklist Amendment Committee 1978) that the form to do so would be *C. d. curonicus*.

Colouration of the soft parts at the time of discovery were: iris, brown; eye skin, bright yellow; bill, black with the first 5 mm of the lower mandible yellow; tarsus and toes, yellowish flesh, claws, grey. The specimen was a male with testes measuring 1.5 x 1.0 mm and 2.3 x 0.9 mm. It was considered to be in its first summer plumage as the skull was not fully ossified. Wing, tail and body moult were complete except for some new feathers appearing on the head. The subcutaneous and peritoneal fat deposits were extremely heavy. Measurements were: total length, 168 mm; wing span, 360 mm; weight, 48 gm; bill, exposed, 14.2 mm; bill, total, 18.8 mm; wing, 116 mm; tail, 62 mm; tarsus, 25.1 mm, mid toe, 16.3 mm; claw 4.6 mm.

Three subspecies are generally recognised (Johnsgard, 1981). *C. d. curonicus* breeds in Eurasia from Scandinavia east through Russia and Siberia to the Sea of Okhotsk and perhaps Sakhalin, and south to the Mediterranean and northern Africa, Asia Minor, central Asia, Mongolia, China and Japan. It winters south to Sri Lanka, the Malay Peninsula, the Sundas and on one occasion to New Guinea (Japan Island). *C. d. jerdoni* is resident throughout the Indian subcontinent from Sind through Burma, the Malay Peninsula and southern China, and south to Sumatra and Borneo. Ali and Ripley (1980) state that *jerdoni* differs from *curonicus* in being slightly smaller. However, *jerdoni* differs considerably from *curonicus* in its moult pattern. The latter has a juvenile-like winter plumage, whereas *jerdoni* lacks a winter plumage. They consider that in India all examples with wing over 114 mm, especially non-breeding birds collected in the plains in winter are probably referable to *curonicus*. *C. d. dubius* (includes *papuanus*) is resident in the Philippines, New Guinea and New Ireland. It differs from *curonicus* in its much smaller size with wing

length ranging from 105 to 110 mm (Rand and Gilliard, 1967, du Pont 1971). The nominate form has little or no black in outer tail feathers, whereas *curonicus* has a distinct black bar on the outer tail feathers.

On the basis of size and the presence of a distinct black bar on the outer tail feathers, the specimen is referred to the form *curonicus*. The occurrence in Australia of the migratory form *curonicus* rather than one of the non-migratory forms *dubius* and *jerdoni* is not surprising.

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* Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory, P.O. Box 38496 Winnellie, N.T. 5789.

** G.P.O. Box 5385, Darwin, N.T. 5794.